



**U.S. AIR FORCE**

## **This Week in USAF and PACAF History** **21 – 27 March 2011**



21 Mar 1912 Lt. Frank P. Lahm flew Signal Corps No. 7, a Wright Model B aircraft, at Fort William McKinley in the Philippines—the **first flight of an airplane at an overseas base**.

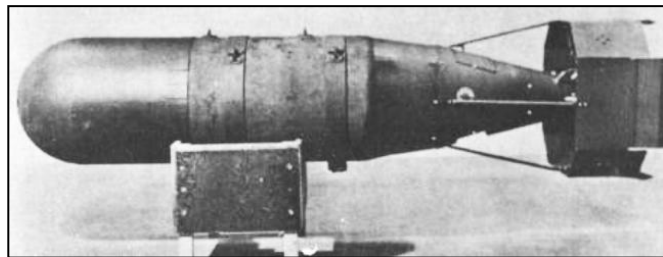
21 Mar 1916 The French authorized formation of the Escadrille Americaine, later known as the **Lafayette Escadrille**. Composed of U.S. pilots, many of whom later served in U.S. air units, this unit was formed on 20 Apr 1916 and trained Americans in aerial combat.



22 Mar 1941 The Air Corps announced the formation of its **first-ever black air combat unit**, the 99th Pursuit Squadron. The unit was to include 47 officers and 429 enlisted men; ground crews trained at Chanute Field, Illinois, while pilots trained at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.

25 Mar 1944 Fifteenth Air Force attacked the Aviso Viaduct in the Brenner Pass, temporarily cutting the main highway between Italy and greater Germany. This raid was the **first Army Air Forces use of radio-guided bombs** – in this case, the VB-1 AZON (azimuth only), the only radio-guided bomb used by the U.S. Army Air Forces during WWII. AZON bombs were later employed in the European Theater in June 1944, and most successfully in China-Burma-India from November 1944 to August 1945.

In Burma, AZONs were used to destroy 27 bridges using 493 rounds, including the famous Kwai River bridge. The AZON (at right) was the crude predecessor of the precision-guided munitions developed and used with great success in Vietnam.



24 Mar 1945 **Operation VARSITY, the Allied crossing of the Rhine River**. Eighth and Ninth Air Forces launched some 7,000 bombing, transport, reconnaissance, interdiction, close air support, and other sorties in support of this offensive. More than 2,000 transports and gliders dropped two Allied divisions on the other side of the Rhine near Wesel, Germany in daylight.



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21 Mar 1946 **Major Air Commands established.** Tactical Air Command was activated to support ground forces, Continental Air Forces was redesignated Strategic Air Command and given the atomic strike mission, and Air Defense Command was established to defend the U.S.

26 Mar 1949 **B-36D maiden flight.** Early versions of the B-36 were equipped with six propeller engines (below left). These aircraft burned fuel at an exorbitant rate, especially when fully loaded, and still lacked the required performance. The B-36D was the first version with jet engines, and the first 10-engine aircraft in the world. (Photo of 10-engine B-36 - below right.)



23 Mar 1951 **Operation TOMAHAWK.** In the Korean War's second airborne operation and the largest to occur in one day, 120 USAF transports dropped more than 3,400 troops and 220 tons of materiel behind enemy lines at Munsan-ni, Korea. The operation attempted to catch the North Korean I Corps between the airborne troops and an armored attack across the front, but the enemy forces escaped northwards. Some believe the operation plan was leaked to the enemy.

24 Mar 1955 The **Seventh Air Force** established its headquarters at Wheeler AFB, Hawaii in the newly modified and rehabilitated Building 107.



24 Mar - 20 Jun 1999 **Operation ALLIED FORCE / NOBLE ANVIL.** To prevent the forced eviction and genocide of ethnic Albanians living in Kosovo, NATO launched this operation against Yugoslavia. It was exclusively an air campaign and NATO's first combat operation against a sovereign nation. The U.S. operation was named NOBLE ANVIL. The USAF used the B-2 for the first time in combat, and F-15s shot down two MiG-29s on the first day. (Yugoslavian MiG-29 at left.)

27 Mar 1999 **Operation ALLIED FORCE – F-117 Shootdown.** The Serbians shot down an F-117 in Yugoslavia—the only combat loss of a stealth fighter. The leader of the rescue effort was Capt John A. Cherrey, an A-10 pilot on his first combat mission. Capt Cherrey located the downed F-117 pilot and later received the Silver Star.



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Theories about the F-117 shootdown include: Serbian experience with F-117 operations and routes, relocation of Serbian air defense systems, failure of U.S. intelligence to detect those movements, Serbian use of long wavelength radars to string together a track of momentary sightings, Serbian luck at getting a look at the F-117 with its bomb bay doors open (increasing its radar signature), and the use of infrared or optical tracking systems to sight the aircraft. General John P. Jumper, USAFE Commander at the time, said “the shootdown was mostly the result of ‘a lucky shot.’ Those limited times of exposure that we know exist” - when the F-117 opens its bomb bay doors, or presents certain angles to a radar - lasted just a little bit too long. We were targeted by a SAM site that we didn't have precisely located.” Ref: Air Force magazine article [\*Two Decades of Stealth\*](#).



27 Mar 1999 **The “Melissa” computer virus** swept across the Internet, destroying electronic programs and databases. Air Force systems escaped serious damage with the help of an Air Combat Command antivirus program.

26 Mar 2003 **Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.** Nearly 1,000 U.S. Army soldiers based at Vicenza, Italy, parachuted from C-17 Globemaster IIIs into the Kurdish-controlled area of northern Iraq. It was the C-17's first insertion of paratroopers into combat, and the largest mass combat jump since WWII. The aircraft and aircrews came from Charleston and McChord AFB. (C-17 airborne drop photo below.)

